
OVERVIEW

Once it has been determined that the presenting problem has been alleviated and a safe return of the child to their parent is possible, the caseworker must begin a planned process to reunite the family.

**PERMANENCY
PLANNING
TIMEFRAMES**

The goal of reunification must be formally reassessed at different decision points throughout the case to determine if the current goal is still appropriate. Caseworkers must use the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Permanency Planning Decision Tree each reporting period when determining whether to recommend return of the child to the parent or a goal change from reunification to another permanency goal; see [FOM 722-09B, Reunification Assessment](#) and [FOM 722-09C, Safety Assessment](#).

**Permanency
Planning at Six
Months**

Once a child has been in out of home care for six months with a goal of reunification, the caseworker must hold a family team meeting (FTM) to review the permanency goal, progress, and barriers; see [FOM 722-06B, Family Team Meeting](#). This meeting can also be an opportunity to review the concurrent permanency plan and whether the permanency goal needs to change; see [FOM 722-07A, Concurrent Permanency Planning](#).

**Permanency
Planning at 12
Months**

The caseworker must complete a formal permanency goal review annually from the acceptance date, or at any time a goal change is being considered. The caseworker must use the [DHS-643, Permanency Goal Review](#), to document the current permanency goal, any barriers to the goal, and the action steps that will be taken to meet the goal. A copy of the form must be uploaded in the electronic case record.

**Maintaining a
Permanency Goal
of Reunification
Beyond 12 Months**

For any child who has a permanency goal of reunification for more than 12 months, the child's caseworker, with written approval from the supervisor, must include a written explanation in the case service plan justifying the continuation of the goal. The explanation must include any other services necessary or circumstances that must occur to achieve the goal.

No child may have a permanency goal of reunification for more than 15 months unless there are compelling reasons to believe that the child can be returned home within a specified and reasonable time. Compelling reasons must be documented in the record and approved by the caseworker's supervisor; see [FOM 722-07C, Permanency Planning - Termination of Parental Rights](#).

The reunification goal must not be extended or delayed due to a change in caseworker or supervising agency. A parent's resumption of contact or overtures toward participating in the case service plan in the days or weeks immediately preceding the permanency planning hearing, in the absence of other compelling reasons, are not sufficient grounds for maintaining a goal of reunification.

**CASEWORKER
RESPONSIBILITIES
IN REUNIFICATION**

Prior to returning a child to the home of a parent, the caseworker must:

- Determine the motivation and capability of the parent or legal guardian to ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of the child.
- Consider whether return home would cause a substantial risk of harm to the child's life, physical health, or mental well-being. When the child is placed with a parent, the court must make a written finding that the "Conditions of the placement are adequate to safeguard the child from the risk of harm to the child's life, physical health or mental well-being."
- Document benefit from services provided to the parent, other relevant adults in the home, and the child that minimizes the

potential for further abuse or neglect. Overall barrier reduction must be either partial or substantial; see [FOM 722-09B, Reunification Assessment](#).

- Caseworkers must obtain information from service providers when assessing the parent's progress towards rectifying the barriers to reunification. Caseworkers must document collateral contacts with service providers in social work contacts and include the service providers' assessment of the parent's progress in the case service plan.
- Supervisor approval of the case service plan indicates supervisory approval of the recommendation to return the child to a parent.

Parenting Time

For all cases with a goal of reunification, the caseworker and family must establish a parenting time plan that includes specific behaviors expected of the parent during parenting time and conditions necessary to expand parenting time prior to reunification; see [FOM 722-06I, Maintaining Connections: Parenting Time, Sibling Visitation, and Contact](#).

Case Planning

Within 30 days of the child's removal and at a maximum of every 90 days thereafter, the caseworker and family must develop and review the case plan; see [FOM 722-06, Case Planning](#). The case service plan and associated Parent-Agency Treatment Plan (PATP) must outline:

- The circumstances that must exist for the caseworker to recommend return of the child to the parent.
- The services needed to achieve those circumstances.
- Parental progress and barriers towards achievement of the goals in the case plan and overall permanency goal.

Prior to the child's return home, the caseworker and family must negotiate post-reunification services that will support the child and family in maintaining the child safely at home after reunification and address any unmet needs prior to case closure; see *Post-Reunification* in this item.

**Community
Supports**

Caseworkers must assist the family with establishing, or re-establishing, community support systems for the family, such as prevention services, educational services, childcare, employment services, or recreational services.

**Law Enforcement
Information
Network
Clearances**

Caseworkers must request a Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN) clearance on all adult household members and non-parent adults within the parental home; see [SRM 700, Law Enforcement Information Network \(LEIN\)](#).

Safety Assessment

Caseworkers must determine which safety interventions will be necessary to ensure the child's safety if the child is returned to or maintained in the parental home. Caseworkers must recommend return home when the safety decision is *safe* or *safe with services*; see [FOM 722-09C, Safety Assessment](#).

**POST
REUNIFICATION**

Services to the family must continue until safety and stability are achieved and the child is not at risk for re-removal.

Note: Post placement services that are paid for through MDHHS are not to continue beyond 90 days without documented supervisory approval or a court order.

**Prevention
Services: Family
First Prevention
Services Act**

Children who return home to a parent may be eligible for evidence-based services to prevent re-removal under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) for up to 12 months after reunification; see [SRM 108, Prevention Services: Family First Prevention Services Act](#).

**Visitation
Requirements**

The caseworker must continue regular contact with the child and family after they are returned home until case closure; see [FOM 722-06H, Case Contacts](#).

Family Reunification/Families First

If the family is receiving services from Family Reunification Program (FRP) or Families First of Michigan (FFM), those programs are responsible for complying with some visitation requirements; see [FOM 722-06H, Case Contacts](#), and [FOM 903-17, Support Services to Families](#).

**Continued
Relationships**

Caseworkers must be sensitive to the relationship that has developed between the child and caregiver(s). Whenever it is possible and constructive, caseworkers, families, and out-of-home placement providers should discuss opportunities for maintaining relationships after reunification.

**Post Placement
Safety**

If the caseworker finds that the parent has not benefitted from services and the child is at imminent risk of harm after return home, the caseworker must file a motion for a re-hearing or a petition for removal with the court.

If the caseworker has reasonable cause to suspect that the parent has abused or neglected the child, the caseworker must make an immediate report of suspected abuse or neglect to Centralized Intake; see FOM 722-13, Referrals to Children's Protective Services.

If CPS determines that the child has been abused or neglected, CPS must file a supplemental petition with the court; see [PSM 714-5, Maltreatment in Care](#).

Medicaid Coverage

Children who are no longer in an out-of-home placement are not categorically eligible for Foster Care Dependent Ward Medicaid (MA-FCDW). If a parent wishes to continue Medicaid coverage for

a child after the child's return home, the parent must apply for assistance online through the [MI Bridges website](#) or by submitting a [MDHHS-1171, Assistance Application](#), to their local MDHHS office prior to the child's return. Caseworkers must assist parents with this process if necessary.

The eligibility determination will be completed by an eligibility specialist to ensure Medicaid can be redetermined without a lapse in medical coverage for the child; see [FOM 803, Foster Care - Medicaid](#).

CONTACT

Direct questions about this item to the [Child Welfare Policy mailbox](#).